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SUBJECT: AWAKENING LEADER ABU AZZAM ON GOI COOPERATION
POLITICAL PLANNING

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Robert Waller for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (S) Summary: Abu Ghraib Awakening movement leader Abu Azzam told FSEC that the Awakening movement continues to progress, though some GOI and ISF elements remain opposed to them. In Abu Ghraib, Iraqi Army units target Awakening members for harassment, even after the GOI hired 1500 local men into the Iraqi Police. New IFCNR Chair Mohammed Salman is a "good man" though he may have a hard time countering those in the PM's office who will continue to block progress. Abu Azzam is focusing his efforts on political work, including organizing among existing Sunni parties and former insurgent leadership, with a view toward taking part in upcoming elections. Awakening movements have diminished the importance of resistance groups, though they remain influential. Local leaders of these groups are distrustful of externally-based leadership, especially those located in Syria. Abu Azzam is working to bring these elements together, free of Syrian influence, which he considers a more significant long term threat than Iran. Sunnis need to avoid past mistakes and focus on upcoming elections, paying close attention to likely attempts by ISCI, Dawa, and IIP to manipulate results. ISCI, as Iran's "strategic partner" is a more significant long-term threat than JAM. End Summary.

12. (S) State and MNF-I Force Strategic Engagement Cell (FSEC) co-directors met March 11 with Abu Ghraib Awakening and SoI leader Thamir Kadhimi al-Tamimi (Abu Azzam). Abu Azzam was in a reflective mood, noting the many meetings he had with FSEC and FSEC's precursor organizations over the past 18 months. He said the Awakening movement remains generally "on the right track," though progress has slowed, and obstacles remain. He said he still believes elements of the GOI are "working against the tribes, the Awakenings, and reconciliation," particularly those "close to Iran." He said he understands there are differences among GOI actors, including some trying to move forward, while others close to the PM continue trying to derail progress.

13. (S) In Abu Ghraib, he said the Awakening continues to be targeted and suppressed by Iraqi Army elements, a longstanding source of tension that threatens to worsen with plans

to expand the territory covered by the IA unit in the area. He claimed that the GOI has "done nothing" to improve this situation. FSEC noted that the GOI had in fact hired 1500 local men, many of them from the Awakening movement, into the Iraqi police last September. Abu Azzam admitted that this had improved the situation somewhat, but only outside those areas that the Iraqi Army actively controls.

14. (S) Abu Azzam returned to the theme that the GOI is acting against the Awakenings, noting that ISCI/Badr elements and "those close to the PM" were actively opposing GOI cooperation with the Awakening. He said the GOI refuses to acknowledge the accomplishments of the Awakening movement, outside of some acknowledgement of the Anbar-based Sahwas. FSEC again noted the reality that both PM Maliki and ISCI VP Adel Abdel Mehdi had publicly praised the efforts of the "volunteers."

15. (S) FSEC asked whether Abu Azzam had managed to remain in contact with IFCNR (following meetings arranged by FSEC last fall). Abu Azzam said he had not, though he was heartened by the choice of Mohammed Salman as the new Chairman (FSEC had previously brought Mohamed Salman and Abu Azzam together in Mohammed Salman's capacity as a PM Advisor). "He is a good man - we became friends," he said. Abu

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Azzam said he believed Mohammed Salman had fallen out of favor with the PM for a time last year because he had advocated for the transfer of the IA commander in Abu Ghraib on behalf of Abu Azzam.

16. (S) Abu Azzam said he is now spending "90 percent of my time" on Sunni national politics. "I have political aspirations, as you know," he explained. He said he plays many roles outside of Abu Ghayb, including as mediator, liaison across various Sunni political groups, and advisor to other Awakening movements. He said he has emphasized in media interviews the political nature of his work, trying to dispel "fears" the Iraqi public might have, and explain the role Awakenings can play. Abu Azzam said he is currently working with Sunni political figures including Salah al-Mutlak, Adnan al-Dulaymi, and Khalaf al-Alayyan to build a political network that will include his Awakening contacts. They are working with a view toward upcoming provincial elections, and have been focused recently on getting allies appointed to the provincial elections committees.

17. (S) He remains in close contact with former Sunni insurgent leaders (Abu Azzam himself is a former member of Jaysh al-Islami), and even has reached out to disillusioned former AQ-I members. However, he was dismissive of other attempts to organize the former resistance leaders into a political organization. He said the Political Council for the Iraqi Resistance (PCIR - announced last fall) is a "facade" painted over several non-cooperating groups of which 1920s Brigade, Jaysh al-Islami and Jaysh al-Mujahideen are

the most important, while Hamas-Iraq, Salah al-Din Brigades, and Ansar al-Sunna are less important. Further, the leaders inside don't trust those based outside the country (note: Abu Azzam seems to move comfortably among both groups). Behind the PCIR is Syria, described by Abu Azzam as "the one country that poses a greater threat than Iran." He said the Awakening movement has played a role in "scaling down" these groups. The Baath party remains politically influential, but with little or no military activity.

¶8. (S) Abu Azzam said he remains in contact with members of each of these groups, and aspires to lead a "coup" against the Syrian-based leaderships. He would do this by bringing leaders of these groups inside Iraq for discussions free from Syrian influence, and winning support for a moderate political program that would reinforce the fight against AQ-I, and position his new grouping to compete in the upcoming elections.

¶9. (S) Sunnis, he said, are still paying the price for their decision to boycott the last elections, and this time must be prepared. However, he said he is concerned that these elections will be rigged. He said his supporters are closely watching the formation of the Electoral Commissions to ensure their "neutrality." He said ISCI, Dawa, and the IIP are all working on plans to manipulate the elections. He offered that ISCI is by far the more significant threat to Iraq that Jaysh al-Mahdi, as ISCI is Iran's "strategic partner." It would be a "strategic mistake" for CF to eliminate JAM because it serves as an important check on Badr, and retains "significant support on the street."

¶10. (S) Comment: Abu Azzam was one of the first non-Anbar Awakening leaders - his roots are primarily in the armed groups rather than the tribes. He has had a variety of dealings with the GOI, some facilitated by FSEC and other CF elements, and some on his own. He generally takes a fairly nuanced view of the GOI, but his comments reflect a wide gap that still remains between the Awakenings and the GOI, despite some progress on security cooperation, hiring into the ISF, and newly

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established jobs programs, and underscores the need to keep pushing both sides toward transitioning these efforts into a truly national, rather than sectarian, project. End Comment.

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